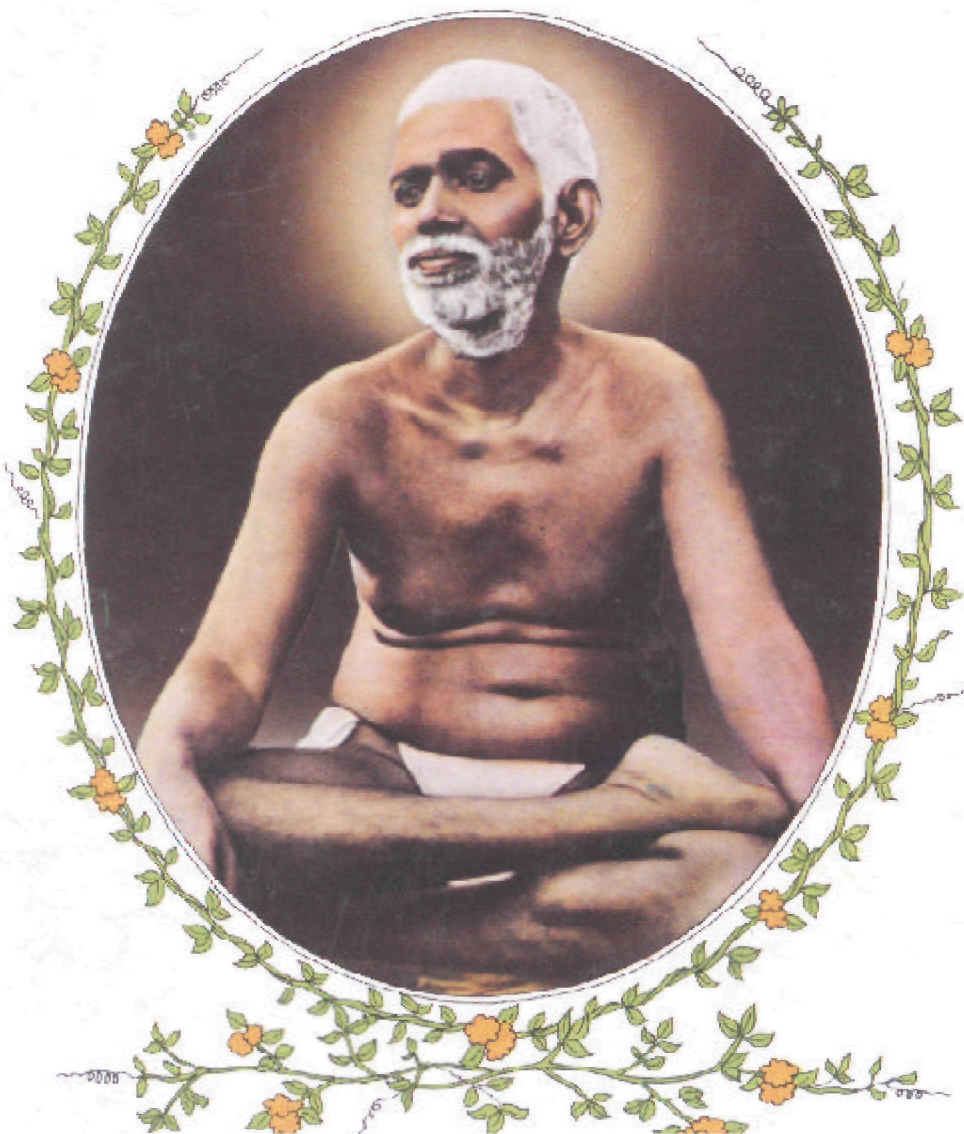


*divinity*  
*here and now*



# *divinity here and now*

by  
A.R. NATARAJAN

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## PREFACE

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‘Divinity, Here and Now’: This is no catchy slogan. Unmindful of the present, the now, we oscillate between the past and the future as mere playthings of time, of karma. Ramana Maharshi exemplifies what it is to live naturally, giving each moment of one’s life full attention. What he taught was a simple and direct way to experience the unknown but limitless joy of an abundant life.

In June 1982, my dear friend V.Ganesan gently insisted that I should write the Editorials in the ‘Mountain Path’ from the July issue. There could be no greater honour. Yet I was hesitant for, the torch bearers of the past two decades had been great spiritual giants: Arthur Osborne, Lucia Osborne, Viswanatha Swami and Prof. K. Swaminathan. Then love for Ramana and his way gave me the courage.

What an opportunity it has been! What a rare blessing! Fourteen editorials have come out so far. I say opportunity for, then, one is soaked in Ramana, the meaning of his words and thoughts about the path. The endeavour has always been to rely on Ramana’s own words, exclusively, to throw light. The path of self-enquiry, for discovering the truth about oneself, is unique and Ramana’s guidance in treading this direct path has been constant and complete. His first spiritual ministration was advice to his mother in 1898. The last, when he was in the body was in 1950. Almost every single word of his in this span of fifty two years has been preserved. Such is the divine scheme. Ramana’s theme is that Self-knowledge is easy and accessible to all. Only steadfast courage and vigilance is needed to tap the fountain of joy within and to feel its overflow everywhere.

Bangalore

Karthigai Deepam day.  
26th Nov ‘85.

A. R. NATARAJAN

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## THE TIGER'S PREY

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Why does Ramana enter a person's life and how? No one but he knows the answer. The experience of many is testimony for his silent, dew-like entry into a life to redeem it, to make it whole. Things would be made easy for the life giving contact, a friend would provide the fare, money would come from unexpected quarters, bosses would not only permit but even strongly suggest visiting the Maharshi and Sri Ramanasramam<sup>1</sup>. In far off Spain a book to spark the interest would be placed in one's hand though the why of it would not be known to the receiver of grace<sup>2</sup>. Years in India would have been wasted with no knowledge of the Master's life or teachings and then suddenly without notice every worthwhile book would come to the person's notice, making them 'the breakfast, lunch, tea and dinner' of the fortunate one<sup>3</sup>. Be it a small village in Netherlands, or a forest hermitage, Ramana would step in quietly and claim 'his flock'<sup>4</sup>. Often he would literally give his shoulder, strong enough to hold the burden of the Universe, to a devotee in need of the help and solace<sup>5</sup>. Not a single word may be exchanged in months, but 'wonderful grace would be poured in'<sup>6</sup> through 'incomparable grace of his steady and shining eyes'. Drug addiction would end just by the penetrating look<sup>7</sup>.

Looking at the mysterious ways of Ramana's advent into the lives of his 'marked' people one is reminded of the story of Saint Sundaramurthy, narrated by Ramana to Suri Nagamma. Sundaramurthy was seated before the sacred fire all set for marriage, awaiting his bride. At this twelfth hour, the great God, Siva, appeared in the guise of an old brahmin to stop the marriage and claim him as His own. Siva produced the necessary document to prove that the bridegroom was pledged, forever, to serve Him. Sundaramurthy reviled Siva as a 'madman' only to fall

headlong into devoted service when the truth of the relationship was revealed as a relationship which was not bound by time<sup>8</sup>. Hasn't Ramana himself hinted to Chadwick that the Guru and the disciple are bound together, always, cutting through time-barriers?<sup>9</sup> Once Ramana enters a life, 'the burning sand' of the worldly life would be carpeted, 'laden thick with fragrant flowers', and a 'strange gladness would fill the journey homeward' to the Heart<sup>10</sup>. Not that one would be freed from Maya's sway straightaway, but it is certain that his grip would be tight and firm, never letting one stray away altogether from the quest. One becomes Ramana's food, no matter however vile, however sinful one may be. Can a prey which has fallen into a spider's web or a tiger's jaw escape?

But when? How long should one toss between the profane and the divine? To be drawn to that great force and yet to be denied the feel of its Presence, as it often happens, is a torture. Ramana's magnetic body did not go the way of all flesh in April 1950. The vivid, tangible, even physical impact continues to be felt sometimes through dreams and visions but always felt by those whom Ramana has chosen to make his for some unaccountable reason.

True, Ramana's entry into one's life cannot be in vain. But for those who are content to remain on the sidelines, for those the good and bad fruits of karma are still tasty, the full impact of the great Presence is not yet. Their contact with eternity is all too brief. The time has not come for them to taste, in full measure, the entry of the Sadguru in their lives.

It is a different story for those whom Ramana charms totally, who are taken over body and soul in a no-holds-barred union. Such ones have no eyes except for that indescribable wonder, the Master's eyes. They cannot escape the bewitchment of his smile. Nothing matters to them, save to be his and let his Presence seep through every pore of their body. The joy of self-forgetfulness, of oneness, fills their Being.



This mood, however, is not for keeps. Imperceptibly, the bodily hunger, the demands of flesh stage a virulent comeback to the point of negating the joy of being Ramana's. It is certain that Ramana will not leave anyone by the roadside and that his succour would be there to strengthen and sustain. But in the intermediate stage, when one is not steadfast in love for Ramana, many ego-traps of attachments seem to be there ready to lure one away. For, when the Sadguru's tiger-like fangs begin to chew up one's ego, the job is never done at one stroke. It is often left incomplete to be finished at a time which he alone knows to be the best. In this half-way house when one is tossed between the sensate and the spiritual, when one is neither his nor the world's one is inclined to pray sometimes 'Please stop being a magnet. Do not take me at all or take all'<sup>11</sup>. It appears as if Ramana is aloof, withdrawn, unconcerned. Not that he is really, but the dryness, the slipping away makes one forlorn.

Sometimes then one cries out in anguish 'where have you gone my God, forsaking me?' One yearns and prays 'put out this fire, sweet, cool ocean of boundless grace, put out this fire of separation'<sup>12</sup>. Ramana's 'Arunachala Padigam' is replete with pleadings to the Sadguru not to 'stop midway and leave the task unfinished'<sup>13</sup>. How truly reflective of the longing, the pining for the impersonal beloved who walked on earth as Ramana!

Occasionally the mood of rebellion too sets in. What else can one do except to chaff at the Master's indifference, except to fret and fume at his hide and seek? Must we be a plaything of our Master if we escape being fate's plaything? Why should he not give the company of those who are drawn to him? Why does he not enchant by revealing himself in all his radiant splendour? Why does he 'like poison loath, the love that was honey-sweet?'<sup>14</sup>

One may question thus, one may feel that he is not doing enough to take over quickly. One may curse the

apparently snail-paced working of his grace. But all said and done, for those who care for him only, there can be no question of going back. Their boats have been burnt. Inscrutable are his ways. There may be no holiday from the unfoldment of fate's merry-go-round. Fate's whiplashes may or may not be blunted. Loneliness may be one's lot. Then one has to remember that having surrendered, the right to question why has also gone. When the dark cloud of doubt and despondency grips one, then, suddenly the Sadguru is there giving his firm hand for the heart-ward journey. Having bartered his glorious state for our paltry self, he steps in almost at the very last second when one is ready to throw up one's hands in despair. Out of the blue the mighty, primal power of Ramana courses through one's veins. His tiger-like grip tightens, and one becomes fully his prey. Once and for all the sorrow of a divisive life centred on the ego ends. As one remains firmly rooted in the natural state which he restores, happiness brims over, within, without and everywhere.

1. Crumbs from His Table - 4th Edition - P. 14
2. The Mountain Path - January 1981 - P. 17
3. Ramana Smrti - Douglas E. Harding.
4. The Mountain Path - January 1982 - P. 121
5. Ibid - April 1978 - P. 114
6. Ibid - April 1978 - P. 114
7. Ibid - April 1978 - P. 75
8. Letters from Sri Ramanasramam - P. 125 - 129
9. Reminiscences of Sadhu Arunachala - 3rd Edition - P. 12-13
10. Muruganar - The Mountain Path
11. Sadhu Arunachala
12. New Song Book - Muruganar - P. 65
13. Arunachala Padigam - verses 1, 2, 3 and 6
14. Mother's Lament - Muruganar's Song Book - P. 30

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## A TIDE IN THE AFFAIRS OF MEN

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Many are called, but it is given to a few to persevere, to remain steadfast. A thousand distractions on the way dilute and set at naught the keen edge of single-minded pursuit of Self-knowledge. The human opportunity is wasted. Can there be a greater misfortune than to come to the Ramana Way and let go a life chance to be free from the whirl of fate?

What then is the human opportunity? Where does our freedom lie? Each human life seems to have a double purpose. The first is an automatic one, the operation of divine law, of exhausting a portion of the ethical balance sheet. The other, contradictory as it may seem, the use of the power inherent in each one to use the discriminative faculty to break this very cycle, to cut the karmic knot. This is where effort comes in. Ramana recognised that unless one is vigilant, sloth and laziness in sadhana, in spiritual practice, might put on the garb of surrender, the garb of leaving everything to the care of Ramana. Hence one finds the emphasis on the need for effort. Effort to turn the mind inward through self-enquiry is something as necessary as it is to breathe. So long as the sense of separate individuality lasts, so long as conceptualisation of the mind takes place, effort for inwardness is a must. For, till such time as the 'I'-thought rises and sinks, activity with the sense of doership is inevitable. Activity being a must, wisdom calls for its being directed right, which can only mean, directed towards such activity as would push the mind inward.

One finds Ramana emphasising time and again the imperative necessity for earnestness in pursuit of self-enquiry. One has to perform this paramount duty, then other things would fall in their place. Performance of what are termed as worldly duties is often an excuse for neglect of seriousness in the quest. So, when asked about duties

Ramana was categorical in affirming that ‘for those who desire the highest, discovering one’s own true nature is most important’.<sup>1</sup> Of course, the infallible instrument for this is the search for finding one’s true identity. Ramana would always reassure one about Guru’s grace being as unfailing as the tiger’s jaws in tackling the ego. But he would at the same time say, ‘nevertheless, the disciple, for his part, must unswervingly follow the path shown by Master’<sup>2</sup>. Human endeavour and the Sadguru’s grace act and react on each other. One cannot rest content with one half-hearted, insipid and weak effort to turn within but should “look within, ever seeking the Self with inner eye”.<sup>3</sup> The need for unwearied endeavour would be evident if one remembers that until one is stable in the natural state, in gnana, one is prone to return to the ego’s net.

A superficial reader of Ramana’s works might be under a misconception. Since effort is to merge the one who makes the effort into the Heart, he might feel that there is no room for or necessity of individual effort. Or, worse still, that it would be wrong to think in terms of it. But this is not so. As mentioned by Ramana, “the will is the purposive force of ‘I’ which determines and implies an act. It is inherent in the ‘I’”.<sup>4</sup> This is not to say one should cultivate a strong will but only to suggest that this ‘purposive force’ must be channelised firmly to withdraw from ceaseless conceptualisations of the mind and push it within. “No one succeeds without effort. Mind control is not your birthright... Effort is necessary upto the state of Realisation”.<sup>5</sup> The effort referred to is not for reaching material goals but is for gathering the mind together and turning it within.

One finds in Ramana’s teachings the same refrain, the same persistent insistence on attentive and involved effort for Self-knowledge. Be it to his mother or to Sadhu Arunachala, or even to a casual visitor to Sri Ramanasramam, Ramana would advise, ‘Make an effort to be without effort’.<sup>6</sup>

Steadfastness in self-enquiry waxes and wanes like the moon, flickers like the wick of a lamp exposed to wind. The ardour cools off, the passion wears off. One becomes careworn by duties, by working with attachments which sap one's energies. Here one has to remember Ramana's advice to Ganapati Muni, "to place one's burden at the feet of the Lord of Universe and to remain all the time steadfast in the Heart".<sup>7</sup> The total commitment to 'That', to giving oneself wholly to the discovery of Truth, alone can make for unflagging interest in the effort necessary for it. Constant stoking of the fire of knowledge by intelligently directed enquiry into the source of the mind is necessary to burn away the dross and prepare one to become the food of the Self.

As long as the wrong identification of the body with the mind lasts, the 'formless link' between the body and the Self remains. Sadhana, the practicing of self enquiry, is needed to break the 'I-thought's unending association with the other thoughts and to expose it to the powerful current of Consciousness, within.<sup>8</sup>

Given this essential need for dogged and thoughtful effort one wonders why is it that the first flush of love for the Maharshi's teachings is allowed to taper off? Why is it not ever fresh, ever new? Why does our heart not remain always captive to the Ramana way. It may be because we are so used to spiritual authority that we are unable to enjoy the fresh air of direct inner communication with Ramana, the Sadguru. Apparently, Ramana's statement 'Where can I go, I am here' has fallen on deaf ears. We cannot afford to forget the fact that he left the body only after 'establishing the certainty of his existence',<sup>9</sup> of his eternal Presence transcending the passing off of the body. He is as much a living guru now as when he walked on earth. His guidance therefore is still available to the same degree. Faith in this is cardinal.

Also, this waning interest, this creeping paralysis of lack of sustained vigour may be because one is used to seeking instant or quick results. A result oriented mind is baffled by the seeming lack of rewards. What better reward can there be than to tap the fountain of joy! But then one has to push within, without losing heart.

Each day there is time to ponder if we are given to resting on our oars. A life given to recollection of our true nature demands, does it not, that we cease to be driftwoods? The entry of Ramana into one's life is like being lashed by a tidal wave which will smash the narrow walls of separative existence. The great force is bound to do its work but this does not mean that one can lead a shallow life of surface dalliance. That would be to negate his teachings, a negation which stems from a failure to recognise where effort is needed and when passivity would take over.

Self-knowledge is discovered by the truly courageous, the brave ones who are not deterred by the obstacles brought about by the play of Karmic forces. Events good, bad and indifferent keep coming and going. But they remain unaffected, ceaselessly working away, letting in the 'cool southern breeze' of the inner current of Consciousness. They take full advantage of the tide in their affairs, Ramana, and are led to the greatest of good fortunes, to the limitless joy of Self-abidance.

1. Selections from Ramana Gita - P. 7
2. 'Who am I?' - Collected works - P. 44
3. The Marital Garland of Letters v. 44 - Collected works - P. 87
4. Guru Ramana - P. 50
5. The Teachings - P. 86
6. A Sadhu's Reminiscences - P. 63
7. Bhagavan and Nayana - P. 14
8. Sat Darshanam v. 24 - P. 27
9. A Sadhu's Reminiscences - P. 67

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## EGOLESS LIVING

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Egoless living! Is such a thing possible at all? Will the ego ever commit suicide? How can one act at all without ego? Will life bloom in all its fullness only when one's life is egoless? These are some of the doubts and fears which arise. For, such a life is outside the sphere of our experience. Action without the actor, a mind without sloth and outward movement, are unknown to us and therefore we fear the logical consequence of the pursuit of self-enquiry, the 'loss' of the mind in the Self. Ramana assures that in this death of the mind or ego is the birth of true life. Then one is born anew in a totally different dimension in which the fountain of joy endlessly overflows. One is, as it were, inundated by it. There is constant renewal, a totality of perception, and perfection in action.

What does egoless living really mean? What is the birth and death of the ego? The rising of the 'I'-thought on waking is ego's birth. All thoughts are its forms. Seemingly infinite is its variety. What constitutes its death? Is it the silence of the mind, made quiescent by breath-control or mental practices which lull the mind? Is it a trance or a swoon? It cannot be these, for these are but temporary spells. When they end, the ego is strident again and is in full cry. The situation would be no different from what it was prior to these spells of mental inactivity. All attempts at 'pruning' the ego are destined to fail. But then is there no sure way to bring about its death? Is there no escape from its suffocating grip?

One can surely nail the coffin of the ego if only one enquires steadfastly and ceaselessly as to where from it originates. Firm attention to the 'I'-thought as it rises each time is all that is needed in the Ramana Way. "Plant your lotus feet upon the head of the ego as it emerges,"<sup>1</sup> prays Ramana to Arunachala, for the mind's outward movement has to be checked before the ego mingles with its associates,

other ceaseless thoughts. If it is caught at the threshold, then, losing its anchorage in conceptual thought, it would fall, crestfallen, into its source - the Self. But that is not the end of the story of ego. Latent tendencies born of residual impressions of past actions would soon externalise the mind. Repeated practice of self-enquiry, however, would result in the mind staying ever merged at its source.

What happens thereafter when the infinite expanse of a limitless life opens up? This is the constant question of the ignorant about knowledge. It must remain a riddle, an unsolved puzzle, so long as the knowledge of that state is only vicarious and not one's own. That it is the most desirable is evident even to those who have tasted a little of 'this maddening bread', who have savoured its sweetness, even if it be for a few fleeting seconds. But being caught up still in the ego's snares, the fear that one would lose all interest in life, that no action would be possible, lingers as an undercurrent. Paul Brunton expresses the universal misgiving when he questions Ramana about what happens when ego comes to an end 'like a snuffed candle'. Ramana's reply to him is most reassuring. It is only then that the door to limitless bliss opens. Muruganar too exhorts: "Don't ask in fear and doubt, 'What will happen if I give up quite this self?' Whosoever lets go the bough he clings to lands on solid earth. You are bound to reach the Self."

It requires the utmost courage to take the plunge. For this, the words of the great ones are a source of great encouragement to dive within. Why this deep-rooted fear? Implicit in this fear is the innate idea that action is performed by reason only of individuality, by reason of the ego's strength. We labour under the idea that the mind is an independent and separate entity. Is it really so? No, though ego might put on the garb of the Self and masquerade as being all powerful, it has no inherent strength of its own. Ramana gives the analogy of images placed on temple towers. Their strained look would make it appear that the



tower is supported on their shoulders. In reality it is the masonry structure which supports the tower as also the images themselves. The individual consciousness or the ego is only a reflection of the Self which is unlimited consciousness. Ramana explains that ego or individuality is like the moon and the Self is like the Sun.<sup>2</sup> The reflected light of the moon is required only so long as the sun does not rise. When the ego merges in its source, and stays so merged, action is performed automatically just as all the activities are carried on in this world when the Sun rises. The 'undercurrent which vivifies the mind' will flow without the limitations imposed by ego's identifications. The mind as we know of it may be dead but in another sense it would function totally for it has become pure. Then action would not only be automatic but would also be perfect.

There is no need for such a one to be active. There is no compulsion of desire, no ambition to be fulfilled, no goals to be reached. 'What action remains for those abiding as the Self?'<sup>3</sup> For, when they are rooted in consciousness, the much cherished values of life pale into nothing and become meaningless. After all, all effort is in search of happiness and once they become the very embodiment of it, nothing more needs to be done. Yet they act with an enthusiasm which is at once exemplary and infectious. But such action is effortless for, in them the sense of doership is totally obliterated. Being wholly unaware of such action, we wonder over and over again if it is possible at all.

Ramana gives several examples of such action. He asks, when we walk from one place to another do we count the steps? Does a sleep walker know that he is walking? Would a child which is fed by the mother, when asleep, know that it was fed?<sup>4</sup> Again he refers to women walking with water pots on their heads, chatting with their companions but keeping their attention still fixed on the load on their heads.

What happens is that every action is complete and there is no carry forward of thought. For the egoless,

incidents, as for a child, are of interest only as long as they last. When they are over, they are over. No residual impressions are left by the actions.

When asked by Paul Brunton whether an egoless person's actions would always be right, Ramana says -

‘They ought to be. However, such a person is not concerned with the right or wrong of action. His actions are God’s and are therefore right’.<sup>5</sup>

The egoless persons having no feeling of a separate individuality just float in the divine current for fulfilling its purposes. What marks them out is their total faith in the cosmic order. Ramana’s remarks to Paul Brunton that ‘he who has given life to the world knows how to look after it’ typifies this attitude. A prayer of Ramana to Arunachala is also worth recalling for it reflects their unfailing remembrance of the fact that it is the Creator’s Law and His Grace which shape everything -

‘Ordain that my burden should no more be mine but yours, for what can be a burden for you, the all sustainer’.<sup>6</sup>

For those whose mind has ceased further search, having reached the heart of bliss, “life is a copious spring of ever fresh experience”! Since there are no ‘others’ for them they are ‘humbler than the humblest’ and are overflowing with love. Enveloped as they are in the infinite, in them one finds the confluence of peace and power. Their very presence is a benediction to humanity.

1. Arunachala Padigam (Eleven verses) - Verse 7
2. Selections from Ramana Gita - The Science of the Heart - Verses 11 and 12
3. Upadesa Saram - Verse 15
4. Maharshi’s Gospel - P. 8 - 9
5. Unpublished record of Paul Brunton and Munagala Venkataramaiah - P. 121
6. Arunachala Padigam - Verse 9
7. Garland of Guru’s Sayings - Verse 202.

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## THIEF TURNED POLICEMAN

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The shining of the Self, free from thought, from 'I', is tapas, true penance. This is Ramana's teaching. It is only then that the bliss of existence, the abundant joy of Heart-abidance, can be felt. The activity of the 'I' and the awareness of the Heart's sparkle cannot co-exist. We accept Ramana's words intellectually. We know that Ramana's words have to be true. Yet we seem hesitant to go the whole way, unwilling to experiment with no-holds-barred, to negate, totally, the ego. So wide apart it is from our present way of life, centred on the ego, that there is an unconscious and unsaid fear of 'losing' the very fulcrum of one's existence. Ramana himself recognises the reality of this fear. He, therefore, points out repeatedly that the loss of the ego would open up new vistas, a life without limitation of identifications, a joyous existence uncontaminated by thought. 'When the 'I'-thought perishes, then another 'I' springs forth as the Heart. It is existence in all its fullness'<sup>1</sup>. One should push within fearlessly, to find new life, and not stop at the threshold. For this we have to be on guard, wary of the ego's ways which will wean us away from our right resolve and deny us our moorings.

Let us just have a look at some of the mind's deceitful ways to retain its sovereignty over us. In self-enquiry, all our energies are gathered at the source to push the 'I' within. But hundreds of thoughts are right there waiting for a chance to intrude, to take hold of us. These intrusions, this thought veil, cannot be lifted, cannot be effectively tackled if we make any distinction between thoughts, being lax to the pleasant ones and battling only against the unpleasant. Ramana makes this point, effectively, when answering a distraught devotee. Bose, drowned in sorrow on his son's death, wanted to 'have it out' with Bhagavan. His first question was, 'Is sorrow a thought?' 'All thoughts are sorrowful', replied

Ramana. Bose found it hard to accept this and queried again. 'Are even pleasant thoughts sorrowful?' 'Yes', said Ramana, 'because thoughts take one's attention away from the Self, which is undiluted happiness'<sup>2</sup>. Anything which comes in the way of Self-attention has to be tackled, and for this all thoughts are on par, they have to be discarded. Attention has to be riveted on the 'thinker' for it is only then that the inner journey can begin.

Another ruse which the mind deploys to weaken Self-attention, to dilute our strength of purpose, our single minded effort, is to suggest a wrong import to some of Ramana's statements. Some ask, "Has not Bhagavan said 'Be quiet'?" Does being still imply inactivity, a mere passivity? No. This point was clarified to Natanananda. 'Being still is not an effortless state of indolence. All mundane activities which are ordinarily called effort are performed with the aid of a portion of the mind and with frequent breaks. But the act of communication with the Self or remaining still inwardly is intense activity which is performed with the entire mind and without a break'<sup>3</sup>. The quest for finding out one's true identity demands incessant alertness in warding off thoughts and for clinging to the 'I'.

Again some ask, "Has Ramana not affirmed, 'Whatever is not destined to happen will not happen despite every effort. What is destined is bound to happen. This is certain.'?"<sup>4</sup> Therefore the need for effort is questioned. Why not let the inward journey take its own course? To argue thus would be to misunderstand the Master's teaching. For one thing, except for a rare few the acceptance of the inevitability of the course of events is only at the superficial level. Action is done with the sense of doership, with the thought that success and failure are products of that effort. When it comes to spiritual sadhana, an attitude of pseudo-surrender is taken up. What Ramana talks of is not the effort for achieving desired goals but effort to find out one's true identity. Such self-enquiry, if well directed, will bring about an

attitudinal change. Then all events could be looked upon neutrally, neither as good or as bad, but as a mere flow of Karma. The bite would thus be taken out of any event for, it would not have the power to elate or cause pain. This change in outlook is not a gift of God's. It is not Manna from heaven, but has to be worked for. Ceaseless self-enquiry alone can bring it about.

Then there is the lure of scholarship, particularly for those who have a natural intellectual inclination. There is no end to the study of scriptures or research into works of Ramana. 'To what purpose?' one should ask. Once the path is comprehended it would be a mere waste of time to endlessly delve into the meaning of words instead of practicing the path. Merely to keep on studying the scriptures is bound to be counter-productive. The ego of scholarship, the idea 'I-know' would take a subtle hold. Hence it is that the Master says. 'I may be that wives and children form the family of the unlearned but in the minds of the learned there are many families consisting of books'<sup>4</sup>. What matters is practice and experience. All else would lead only to dry polemics and meaningless philosophical disputations. When one is 'That', the Self, is it not mere mental weakness to endlessly repeat words instead of just abiding as 'That'?<sup>5</sup>

Another mental clog is the feeling which creeps in, along the way, that we are not making any headway. One doesn't seem to progress at all, get anywhere. The sense of arrival is not there. Used as we are to tangible results, we feel lost. There are of course some who want fruits in double quick time as typified by a casual visitor who said, 'Tomorrow I am leaving this place. Maharshi, if you give me Self-Realisation I shall always think of you'<sup>6</sup>. But even those who are totally involved are apt to lose heart. Hence it is important to remember that right effort would never go waste. When, in what time, it would bear fruit cannot be postulated with any degree of certainty. For, one might be gun-powder ready to catch fire or wet firewood which can light up only slowly.

Then there is also the difference in the intensity of effort, in the passion for Self-knowledge, in the total concern for it. Here it would be worth recalling the conversation which Cohen had with Bhagavan. ‘Bhagavan, you have given me a home for my body. I now need your grace to grant eternal home for my soul, for which I broke all my human ties and came’. Ramana gazed silently on the calm waters of the tank nearby and replied, ‘Your firm conviction brought you here; where is the room for doubt?’<sup>7</sup> This loving reassurance is not only for Cohen but for all those on the Ramana Way. One has the right to demand, “Have you not called me. Curse your fate, but protect me”<sup>8</sup>. Can his call which draws us to him ever be in vain? We must leave it to him to push the enquirer within until he is sucked in by the Heart, but effort we must make.

We do not know what austerities observed by us, what fasts and prayers of the past lives have brought us to the Ramana Way. This rare good fortune is inexplicable. Having come, limitless happiness is within our grasp. Would it not be a tragedy of tragedies to fritter away this opportunity? As we tread the Ramana path steadfastly and vigilantly, the joy of Heart-abidance, the beatitude of just existing is felt. It comes and goes leaving a lingering taste and longing. Then we slip, become externalised. But this is of no consequence so long as Ramana and the Ramana Way remain as our pole-stars, our mariner’s compass. We are bound to get back, feeling, as we mature in steady wisdom, the joy of anonymity, of egoless living. Then we know the importance of unimportance, and the mind is not there to play its tricks.

1. Upadesa Saram - Verse 20
2. Guru Ramana by S. S. Cohen - P. 42
3. Bhagavan Ramana and Mother - P. 11-12
4. Collected works - Supplement to Forty Verses - P. 125
5. Sat Darshanam - Verse 32
6. Guru Ramana by S. S. Cohen - P. 32
7. Ibid - P. 20
8. Marital Garland of letters - Verse 94

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## DIVINITY - HERE AND NOW

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In the beginning it is like poison. But in the end it is nectar. This is how spiritual practices are generally described. For, even those who have been treading the religious path for quite some time are only too familiar with the daily battles during the hour of meditation. The unwanted, intruding thoughts seem to be just waiting round the corner to push out the desired thought. The single thought which one sets out to contemplate on is crowded out by a legion of other thoughts. What is desired is unbroken, natural meditation, like the ‘steady flow of a stream’, but what is achieved is only intermittent, broken, meditation. ‘Controlling winds’ seems a far easier task.

Is one then to waste time and life in the kindergarten of meditation? No, says Ramana. ‘The bliss beyond bondage and limitation is here and now for one who unites with the divine’.<sup>1</sup> Post-dated cheques are of very little value. The taste of the state of bliss, when the ceaseless movement of thought is stilled, must be ours if steadfastness in the pursuit of the inner journey is to be achieved. Unless one is aware of ‘the maddening joy of abidance in truth’.<sup>2</sup> even if it be but once in a while, listlessness may creep in. Energetic adherence to the chosen way of life would seem very difficult. Ramana’s assurance, therefore, is of the greatest significance for those to whom the search for truth and discovery of life’s meaning are of vital importance. Ramana was rooted in the steady wisdom of a Heart-based life. His affirmation is, therefore, born of direct experience. This unique treasure of his experience has been made available to all through his teachings. Ramana asserts that for liberation the vichara or enquiry method suggested by him is the ‘easiest’<sup>3</sup> and ‘straight’<sup>4</sup> as well. If diligently pursued, ‘union with divine’ would necessarily follow.

What then is the essence of this direct path? Before proceeding further, one has to examine the validity of certain fundamental propositions which we are apt to take for granted. We identify the 'I' with the body. We assume that the mind is an independent, conscious, entity. We are unaware of the spiritual centre within us. One has to probe, one has to enquire and find out. What is the true import of the 'I'? Is it limited to the body? If so, what happens to it in deep sleep? What exactly is the mind? Is it different from the 'I' or individuality? What is the mind's link with the consciousness within?

Ramana explains that the mind and 'I' or individuality are the same. Why? Because that which we call the mind is only a 'bundle of thoughts'. But these thoughts cannot stand on their own feet. They are dependent on the core thought, the 'I'-thought. Only when linked with 'I'-thought there can be a movement of thought. It is logical to say, therefore, that the 'I'-thought is the mind. But this 'I'-thought cannot be the totality of the individual. Why? Because it 'perishes daily', in sleep. But there is no break in the continuity of one's Being. Ramana sets out these propositions with his characteristic simplicity and brevity in verses 17 to 21 of *Upadesa Saram*. In *Ramana Gita*, he throws clear light on the science of Heart. The Heart is the spiritual centre where fullness of one's existence can be experienced as a spontaneous flash of consciousness, the 'I', 'I'. 'And this is Heaven', 'This is that stillness, the abode of Bliss'.<sup>5</sup> It is from the Heart that the mind rises and it also sinks into it. If the merger of the mind into the Heart is done consciously, as distinct from what happens unconsciously in deep sleep, then knowledge dawns, bliss inundates. This is the theoretical structure.

Ramana, however, laid no store on mere intellectual appreciation. Concepts, however lofty, are but concepts. Anything vicarious is of no value. Hence his emphasis, which was constant, on the importance of practice and experience, a practice in which the means are not different



from the goal.<sup>6</sup> Two infallible weapons in the armoury of self-enquiry, for Self-knowledge, are provided to us by Ramana in the form of two questions - 'Who am I?' and 'Whence am I?' The second is recommended more often for, the mind is only a reflection of consciousness within and is the bridge back to it. It is for this reason that one finds repeated focus being placed on the enquiry as to the source of the mind or individuality, in *Ramana Gita*<sup>7</sup>, *Upadesa Saram*<sup>8</sup> and *Sat Darshanam*.<sup>9</sup> The other tool is complementary and it is most effective in the checking of a body centred life. The spirit of enquiry is kindled. Otherwise, the familiar is never examined. The truth of certain ideas which we unconsciously accept is never closely looked at in any depth. The searchlight is not on them. It is precisely this complacent thoughtlessness of a superficial life which is uprooted by a properly directed self-enquiry.

In this path, the straying cow, the mind, is gradually brought back to the cowshed by feeding it with grass and fodder of the bliss of the Heart. The mind's constant outward movement can be compared to that of a cow which used to thievishly feed on other's pastures. When fed with the fodder of joy of an inner life, in the beginning it would still slip away. But the taste of it would bring it back until a point is reached that it would not stray even if let loose.

In his 'Appalam Song' Ramana says 'work away, untiring, steady, cheerful'. Why self-enquiry without let or with unflagging vigour? Because the mind is habituated to look outward for happiness. The residual memories of past actions would make it difficult for the mind to stay sunk at the Heart. So long as the mind is not naturally silent, vigilance would be a must to turn the mind back to its source. Why joyously? Because in it lies the key to a joy whose abundance knows of no limit. If self-enquiry is done with zest then the mind's movement outward through association with other thoughts will cease. The mind would be intuned and quiet. It is, however, essential at this stage to

remember that the inturning of the mind is but the first step. The pleasure of quietness which follows can become the grave-yard of spiritual progress. Often such mental stillness might delude one into the belief that the goal is reached. One has to push deeper and deeper by persisting in the enquiry for the source of the 'I' by questioning 'For whom is this quiet?' Beyond a point effort ceases, then effort would be impossible. The 'inner magnet', the Heart, would take over and draw one within. The enquirer, the individual, would be lost in the divine current, in the Whole. The bliss of truth would be overwhelming when this union of the individual and the divine takes place. The 'steady river of peace' would reign supreme for our natural state of bliss and oneness would have been discovered. Joy would remain as a constant under-current. Activity would not be a disturbance to the overflow of the bliss within making each moment of our life new and vibrant.

1. Upadesa Saram - Verse 29
2. Marital Garland of Letters - Verse 23
3. Collected Works of Ramana Maharshi, Atma Vidya - P. 101
4. Upadesa Saram - Verse 17
5. Collected Works of Ramana Maharshi - P. 101
6. Selections from Ramana Gita - Verses 23, 24 & 25 - P. 31
7. Selections from Ramana Gita - Verses 7 & 8 - P. 11
8. Upadesa Saram - Verse 19
9. Sat Darshanam - Verses 14, 26, 27, 28 & 29

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## THE CLOISTER AND THE HEARTH

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To be in the world and not of it; what does it mean? Is it possible to be God's and Man's at the same time? Can one carry on the daily activities, and also give oneself to God wholly? Is there not a contradiction between worldly activities and the inner search for the Supreme? Should not one choose between the cloister and the hearth?

What is the underlying idea in the withdrawal from the world into monasteries and nunneries? Why the order of Sanyasa? Is not the adoption of a totally different way of life based upon the idea that solitude and insulation from the world are a must for spiritual evolution? Is not the braving of the Himalayan cold, or the heat of caves and a willingness to undergo physical austerities, rooted in the thought that for search for God this withdrawal, such austerity, is essential. While these sacrifices for lofty goals and higher purposes are certainly indicative of earnestness and right resolve, the question would remain whether they are a must.

Therefore, one has to ask oneself the question whether marriage, work and the so called worldly activities would deny one the full flowering in God and total dedication to the Supreme. In Ramana's teachings we find repeated emphasis on not allowing outer circumstances to come in the way of discovery of Truth. Notwithstanding this assurance one finds it difficult to accept this proposition. So ingrained is our belief that sacred Arunachala and a 'London flat' are not the same for a spiritual seeker. It is because of this that we find Ramana being plied with such questions as 'Is not celibacy necessary to realise the Self?' 'Can a married man realise the Self?' 'Should not one renounce home?' 'Is not solitude necessary for a Sanyasin?' and so on.

Ramana would gently but firmly take the questioners back to certain fundamentals. The primary and the

foremost duty of everyone is the pursuit of self-enquiry for Self-knowledge. Diligent, unwavering and attentive enquiry can be performed, and has to be performed in any life situation. The spirit of enquiry, and the capacity to turn the mind within by appropriate enquiry, is a God given freedom to each one of us to enable one to discover the Truth. This liberty is untrammelled and is not limited or circumscribed by anything in life. None can be denied this right to find for oneself the consciousness within. Circumstances like marriage, job and place cannot stand between one and Self-knowledge.

On the contrary, the course of events in life are preordained. They cannot be shaped on desired lines. The divine, karmic, law works itself out with an unfailing certainty, altering the situations and circumstances. The case of two ardent devotees, Sources and her father Chalam, illustrates this. Each year they used to plan a trip to Sri Ramanasramam, but just could not make it due to some circumstance or the other. This happened not for a year or two, but for ten long years.<sup>1</sup> Our paramount duty cannot therefore be linked to events over which we have no control. We are, as it were, bound hand and foot to given environments and situations for the experiencing of which the body has taken shape. Remembrance of this would enable one to pursue self-enquiry with unflagging vigour always, and not to blame the circumstances for failure to do so.

Ramana would never fail to remind that each one of us carries the mental environment wherever one goes. It cannot be left behind. Can one abandon the environment of desires? It is as much a part of us as our shadow. Then what use is there in a mere change of the physical environment. The ego problems would have to be tackled and resolved whatever be the situation or circumstance.

A conversation which Ramana had with a devotee would be worth recalling. This devotee desired to leave Sri

Ramanasramam for a pilgrimage. Ramana told him, 'You have come all the way to Tiruvannamalai for the immediate vicinity of Ramana Bhagavan, yet you do not appear to have mental quietness. Now you want to go elsewhere and from there you will desire to go to some other place. At this rate there will be no end to your travels'.<sup>2</sup>

This is not deny to the usefulness of a spiritual atmosphere. Ramana would encourage the circumambulation of Arunachala and had himself set the example by doing so for over twenty five years. For, Arunachala has the imperceptible but certain power of 'drawing a seeker within and making him silent like itself'. If destiny allows it by all means take advantage of places which are more congenial for spiritual practice but when we have no choice, let us bring in the feeling of being in Arunachala, of being present before the Maharshi's shrine of grace at whatever place we might be.

If we ponder we find that much of the talk of giving up jobs, forsaking families, and so on may be under a momentary and immature impulse. It is not necessarily the product of spiritual ripeness. Weak unmanliness, lack of courage and fortitude may be camouflaged and one may be apt to delude oneself that the renunciation is a product of desire for single-minded search for Truth. For Ramana it was the call from the Father, Arunachala, in obedience to whose command he left home. When asked why he shifted from Skandasramam to near his mother's samadhi, Ramana simply said the same force which brought him to Arunachala had brought him there. Therefore, when one responds irresistably to the magic lure of the divine, the situation is altogether different. Then home should have lost its meaning and the entire universe itself would become home.

It is not work or the family which constitutes the hindrance. The fault is not with the possessions. What needs to be tackled is the possessor and the sense of doership. Merely to give up certain relationships would not free one

from the attachments. What needs to be renounced is the ego. Self-enquiry and the fire of knowledge alone can reduce it to ashes.

As for solitude, it is a matter of an attitude of mind. One may be alone in a crowd or in a crowd even when alone. The tumult of thought, of the uncontrolled mind, would deny solitude. What needs to be understood is, therefore, the nature of the mind and once it is understood the equipoise and equanimity of the mind would make solitude superfluous.

The hankering after a particular circumstance for carrying on spiritual practice also suggests that we have forgotten the fact that the guidance of the Sadguru Ramana is not limited by time and space and is available wherever one is. As the Heart within, he not only lights the flame of enquiry but also keeps it burning till one learns to be 'That' naturally. Ramana made this point specifically to Ramana-nanda Swarnagiri, when he wanted to give up the job in order to be close to Ramana.<sup>3</sup> Ramana's assurance to Ethel Mersten is another instance in point. After many years she wanted to return to Europe to see her friends and relatives but was reluctant to leave Bhagavan. The assurance of Ramana, 'wherever you are, remember Bhagavan is there in your heart watching over you'<sup>4</sup>, settled the matter.

The march of time is relentless. Ramana's message, of unceasing practice of self-enquiry, shields one from being affected by the events. The mood of meditation created by properly directed self-enquiry permeates all action. 'When the current, the link with the Self is established, all work and activities will be performed in the current itself'.<sup>4</sup> Then home becomes heaven. Activity becomes impersonal and perfect. Life itself becomes joyous play.

1. Crumbs from His Table by Ramanananda Swarnagiri - P. 23

2. Crumbs from His Table - P. 18

3. The Mountain Path - April 1984 - P. 79

4. Maharshi and His Message - Paul Brunton - P. 40

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## FAR YET NEAR

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Ramana is timeless, existing everywhere, and always. When the eternal clothes itself in the human form it is only as a concession to our frailty. Ramana would refer to the analogy given by Thayumanavar that God appears as a human being to dispel ignorance just as a deer is used as a decoy to capture wild deer.<sup>1</sup> God has to appear in the body in order to dispel the 'I-am-the-body' idea.

The setting is the Ganesa temple at Tiruvattiyur.<sup>2</sup> Ganapati Muni is performing severe penance and is thinking intensely of Ramana. He finds Ramana by his side pressing his forehead in blessing. For the Muni this was a tangible demonstration of the absence of bodily limitations for Ramana. Years later, writing from Sirsi, the Muni feels the pangs of separation and the distance from Ramana only to remember that his 'gracious look is capable of traversing any distance'. He finds comfort and joy in recalling that none can be outside the immediate orbit of the true light-giver Ramana.<sup>3</sup> The scene changes. It is the death-bed of Meenakshi, Ramana's childhood playmate. Ramana is there by her side, filling her last moments with inexpressible joy. Then we have the case of Jean Clause huddled together with other prisoners in a small town in France. The fear of execution, for wrongs which he did not commit, is staring him in his face. His wife smuggles in a photo of Ramana and everything changes. Many an imminent danger is warded off. Small wonder that he asserts: "People say: you cannot have known Bhagavan, he lived in India and you in France. That is true - and yet I have known Bhagavan and he has protected me. Bhagavan is the Self - and for the Self time and space do not exist."<sup>4</sup> For such ones blessed with direct knowledge nothing further is needed. They know that Ramana is always near.

But long habit has ingrained in us the false notion that

we are the body. We superimpose this on the Sadguru Ramana as well. So he is far away residing on the slopes of Arunachala or at his shrine of Grace at distant Sri Ramanasramam. True, the physical proximity has its own value for one can readily and quickly partake of the radiation of Grace which exists in such proximity. If many had willingly sacrificed the comforts of their home and hearth for the arduous life of living near Sri Ramanasramam just to be near Sri Ramana, it is precisely because of the feeling of nearness which physical proximity brings about. Ramana too would often point out its value by joking at the desire of devotees to go on pilgrimages. For, they were forgetting that they were already at the holy of holies, enjoying the imperceptible but most purifying physical presence of Ramana.

At the same time Ramana was aware that circumstances would often not permit such proximity even if one were to desire it. So Ramana would always indicate the fact of his universal presence, and his accessibility at close quarters to all regardless of geographical limitations.

He had to break the inbuilt stone-wall of identification by the devotees of Ramana with his bewitching form. For them, Ramana was the golden-hued one with an irresistible smile, penetrating and gracious eyes, a person of unforgettable beauty. The difficulty, thus, was heightened by the fact that his body was the abode of God radiating the divine force terrifically. The fifteen months from February 1949 to April 1950, during which Ramana bore the cross of sarcoma, were only to prepare the minds of all to the inevitability of the approaching physical end to the body and to the fact that it did not make any difference to Ramana's continued presence. His effulgence though apparently limited to the body for the time being, was never confined to it.

One cannot read Cohen's day-by-day account of this period without being touched by the gentle manner in which Ramana would drive home his point. Once when



Muruganar prayed that Bhagavan should live to be hundred, Ramana narrated the story of a saint whose disciples prayed on his hundredth birthday that he should live for another hundred years. He then joked, “You want me to live upto hundred, so that you may at the end of it ask for another hundred!”<sup>5</sup> When Subbaramayya asked Ramana to cure himself by his will power he remarked: “Did I ask the tumour to come so that I may tell it now to go? It came of its own accord; what then have I or my will got to do with it?”<sup>6</sup> A surgeon once suggested amputation of the left arm adding the assurance that his life could be saved by it. Ramana dismissed this suggestion and remarked: “As I let you look after your body you will please let me look after mine”.<sup>7</sup> In one sense the body itself was the burden, the disease which he had not cast aside out of his universal love, for fifty-four years after Realisation, an event unparalleled in spiritual history. Thus, humourously sometimes, but firmly always, Ramana imprinted on the mind of everyone that it was the body and not he that was dying. Once this fact becomes an indelible part our psyche, Ramana can never be far, but only be ever near and non-separate.

So much for the long period of illness during which Ramana made the devotees see him in the true light, as the formless source of all life and not only the form he had assumed in the divine drama. Generally too, Ramana would never miss an opportunity to make one understand that he was the impersonal, the bedrock of life, present universally. Once, Sundaresa Iyer sought and got a lucrative job away from Tiruvannamalai. But when it came to leaving he just could not reconcile himself to the idea of the physical separation which it entailed. Ramana asked: “How long have you been with Bhagavan?” “Forty years”, was the reply. Then Ramana remarked: “Here is someone who has been listening to my teaching for forty years and he says he is going somewhere away from Bhagavan!”<sup>8</sup> Here it would also be appropriate to refer to Ramana’s remark: “What does it

matter, if it is hundred miles or a thousand miles? It Acts.”<sup>9</sup> Where is the limitation of time and space for such a one? The story of the Peruvian couple<sup>10</sup>, to whom Ramana told that they could have been with him in Peru itself, underscores this very point that he was not just the body but the Consciousness in which he was rooted. Yet again one can recall that while joining in the singing of Ramana Sadguru he would remind that Ramana was not merely the six foot form seen by the devotees but the eternal Self.

What he sang of Arunachala is equally true of Arunachala Ramana. Every atom of the universe is permeated by Him - the five elements, the sun, the moon, all life are but His manifestation. How then can he be ever far? By providing the infallible means, the direct method of self-enquiry, he has made it possible for each one to experience this for himself.

1. Guru Ramana by S. S. Cohen - P 50
2. Self Realisation by B. V. Narasimhaswamy - P 94
3. Epistles of Light - Ganapati Muni's Letters to Ramana
4. The Mountain Path - Oct. 1972-P. 269
5. Guru Ramana by S. S. Cohen - P 102
6. Ibid - P 101
7. Ibid - P 97
8. At the Feet of Bhagavan by TK. Sundaresa Iyer - P 9
9. The Maharshi by Kapali Sastry - P 94
10. Ramana Smrti - A life-time with Bhagavan by T.K. Sundaresa Iyer.

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## SECRET OPERATION OF GRACE

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Ramana would always remind the visitors and devotees seeking assurance of his Grace that it is there all along, that it is synonymous with God and the Self. Ramana was emphatic about the “Self revealing immediacy of divine grace” and would compare failure to perceive it to the poor vision of the “owl which cannot see the Sun” or to those buds “which do not blossom on sunrise”. He once remarked, “People come and tell me that I must grant Grace. They seem to think that I keep it under lock and key. I am always giving it. If it cannot be comprehended what can I do?”

How then is his Grace vouchsafed? What does it mean to be ‘clothed’ and ‘ornamented’ by his Grace? Ramana’s Grace means different things to different people. It is ordinarily taken to mean his intervention for altering the course of events. The following illustrations are typical: a devotee suggested to her friend to keep Ramana’s picture with her in order that her husband might return to her and reported after some time in the hall that her prayers had been answered. Another devotee present in the hall asked, “What is impossible for Bhagavan?” adding that he had advised a friend that he could continue in Madras, for physical proximity of Bhagavan, if only he prayed to him for that. Devotees would send telegrams and letters to Sri Ramanasramam to be placed before Ramana for curing ailments of their dear ones. Even as the telegram or letter was being despatched there would be relief and miraculous cure which would be attributed to his Grace. Many instances are narrated in *Day by Day with Bhagavan* and *Sri Ramana Reminiscences* of persons turning to him in their hour of need, and invariably getting succour. Ramana himself would, however, dismiss visible signs of his Grace as

being only the automatic intervention of a higher power when matters are brought to the notice of a Jnani. The following conversation which Ramana had with Sri Subbaramayya is germane: “Bhagavan, did you not think that you must do something to save the child?” Straight came his answer, ‘Even the thought of saving the child is a sankalpa and one who has any sankalpa is not a Jnani.’ In fact, such thoughts are unnecessary. ‘The moment the Jnani’s eye falls upon a thing there starts a divine, automatic action which itself leads to the highest good’. Such instances are no doubt important in kindling and sustaining faith in Ramana’s divinity and the inspired nature of his teachings. The first overt act of Grace, however, is the awakening of interest in the search for Truth and for finding the meaning of life. To be saved from the quagmire and quicks of a life of identification with the body, centred on sensory pulls, is truly Ramana’s Grace. For, millions are lost in worldliness. “Remembrance is the forerunner of Grace. That is the response, that is the stimulus, that is Grace.”

To be exposed to the simple and direct path of Ramana for returning to the source, to our natural state of happiness, is the next step, as it were, in the chain of his ‘directed Grace’. For, one could lose oneself in the labyrinth of purely mental spiritual practices. For the search into the source of the ego the vital support is his Grace, for, that pushes the mind inward.

Till one becomes established in the divine milieu one undergoes the torture of “one suspended between life and death”. We are often in a half-way house, having neither anchorage in the Self nor in the body. Old tendencies lash at us, as it were, forcing the mind outward and the joy of Self-abidance is far too weak or intermittent to act as a countervailing force to pull the mind inward. At this juncture, Grace is needed most.

Ramana himself once quoted Nayana (Ganapati Muni) as saying: “In going forward one can run any distance at any

speed, but when it is a question of going backward, that is, turning inward, even one step is hard to take". The capacity of the mind to be fully focussed on the 'I'-thought is not strong enough on many an occasion. Ramana himself puts this situation very clearly in the 'Marital Garland,' when he says, "Seeking you with my weak mind I have come back empty-handed. Aid me O Arunachala!"

In the inward journey too one could be lost by mistaking 'lulling of the mind' as being the end of the journey. The case of Sankarananda, a devotee saved by Ramana, would serve to bring out this point. Sankarananda would sit for long hours in the hall. While meditating he would be overtaken by spells of 'stillness of thought'. To get him out of this state, Ramana would request Sri Kunju Swami and Sri Viswanatha Swami to take him out to the temple or for a walk to the lake. For, no further progress would be possible otherwise. It is Ramana's Grace alone which enables one to cross this stage and push inward, deeper, to the zone of the Self. It gives the strength for persisting in the enquiry upto the point where it is required before 'letting go' to be 'swallowed alive' by the sea of bliss, the Self. "Grace is thus the beginning and end. Introversion is due to Grace; Perseverance is Grace and Realisation is Grace". So important is Grace for the search and for Self-abidance that Ramana uses the expression as many as fifty-one times in the 'Marital Garland of Letters'.

Again, it is the Grace of Ramana which enables us to be aware where exactly our true freedom lies. The first instruction which he gave to his mother was that events are preordained according to the divine law. In response to questions put to him, he would emphasise that freedom "lies in not identifying oneself with the body and in not being affected by pleasures and pains consequent on the body's activities".

The feeling that we are utterly helpless and incapable of shaping events and circumstances according to our choice

increases the ability to cast the ‘burden of care’ on the supreme power which ‘sustains all things’.

Self-enquiry and surrender are possible only by his Grace which operates unnoticed like the morning dew, cleansing the mind both of its self-regarding activity and its laziness. The secret of this alchemy of Grace is not known for, like a spider, Ramana holds us tight in his Gracious orbit to consume us at his hour. But one thing is certain. He is like ‘the mighty Aruna Hill’, ‘the life-destroyer’, and he too has ‘raised the flag vowing the death of the ego of his devotees’.

What indeed would have been our lot had he contented himself with just enjoying the bliss of Self-abidance! But, Ramana graciously accepts the responsibility and becomes our ‘helmsman’, our ‘staff of life’ in the spiritual journey. This is illustrated by two instances:

Balarama Reddy would pay obeisance to the Maharshi early every morning and then pursue self-enquiry in the privacy of his own room. He was not yet aware of the transforming influence of the physical proximity of Ramana. Ramana noticed this. When his broad hint failed, he literally thrust his Grace on Reddy, by mock anger, and made him realise the immeasurable advantage of ‘questing within’ in Ramana’s presence.

A leaf from Sri T.K. Sundaresa Iyer’s diary is also worth extracting in this context. “One day I wondered why I was visiting him at all. What was the use? There seemed to be no inner advancement. Going up the Hill was meaningless toil. I decided to end my visits on the Hill. For one hundred days exactly I did not see Bhagavan. On the hundred and first day, I could suffer no longer and I ran to Skandasram above Virupaksha Cave. Bhagavan saw me climbing, got up and came forward to meet me. When I fell at his feet, I could not restrain myself and burst out in tears. I clung to them and would not get up. Bhagavan lifted me up and asked: ‘It is over three months since I saw you. Where were you?’ I told

him how I thought that seeing him was of no use. ‘All right’, he said, ‘May be it is of no use, so what? You felt the loss, did you not?’ Then I understood that we did not go to him for profit, but because away from him there was no life for us”.

The steady light of Ramana’s Grace will do its work shining like the golden rays of the rising Sun, enabling us to abide, for ever, sunk deep in the ocean of Bliss.

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## STEADFAST SERVICE

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A liberating air of freedom comes to one's life when Ramana enters it. There is sweetness and joy in losing ourselves in him in a union in which no individuality is left. What does communion with Ramana mean? Is it an act of volition, an exercise of our will, or is it the operation of his grace? Do both have to go hand in hand?

One thing, however, is clear, that to be chosen, to be touched and transformed by this communion, is the greatest good fortune that can happen to anyone, for it is the nature of Ramana to give his Sivahood, his auspiciousness, his supreme state of Bliss, in exchange for one's narrow, limited self.

Between the first awakening and inseparable union with Sadguru Ramana, there is a gap to be bridged. Because, the mind continues to keep the company of its sensory friends. To cling steadfastly to Ramana and his way, one has to rely on several complementary spiritual practices.

It is of the utmost importance to establish a relationship with Ramana and be able to perceive his grace through constant prayerful surrender to him. To begin with when the 'body am I' idea is strong and deep-rooted one has to learn to establish a human relationship with him as we do with those whom we consider our 'near and dear ones'. Let him be 'ours' as father, mother, Guru, or all rolled into one, which indeed he is and more. This would enable the flow of thoughts in his direction by contemplation on the extraordinary beauty of his form and life. For, 'the worship of the luminous Supreme in any name or form is certainly the way for attaining it'.<sup>1</sup> It appears that it is for this reason that Ramana allowed himself to be photographed in so many places and postures. Some charming and enchanting and other magnetic and sublime. Be it mid-day or fading light, indoor or open, he would never say 'no' and would look into



the camera like an eager child. Ramana was aware that many would be drawn to his divine form and through it to newer, brighter, and vaster vistas in life.

The devotional songs composed by Bhagavan himself are a source of strength and joy. ‘Arunachala Aksharamanamalai’ and ‘Arunachala Pathigam’ call forth tears of love and ecstasy in the singers and hearers. The worshipper merges in the worshipped and what is left is only the vast beatitude.

The potency and efficacy of Ramana’s name has been stressed by Muruganar who proclaims it to be the sacred mantra which is at once the way and the goal. Sundaresa Iyer’s sadhana was just to repeat Ramana’s holy name after getting his specific consent for it.

Then there is the companionship of the works of Bhagavan. When Sundaresa Iyer was drafting the preface for the Tamil original of the *Collected Works of Ramana Maharshi*, he wrote, “It is hoped that these Works would liberate a person”. Bhagavan suggested that the phrase ‘it is hoped’ be changed to ‘it is certain’. For, these books contain the original teachings and also clarifications given by Sri Bhagavan to earnest seekers of the path of self-enquiry incessantly taught by Sri Bhagavan.

We cannot truly feel the love for Ramana or bear witness to it save by a loving faith in his teachings and steadfastness in treading the Ramana Way. True, Ramana never disturbed anybody’s faith but he never also failed to stress the paramount importance and the unfailing efficacy of self-enquiry. In Upadesa Saram, he asserts that the search to find out the true import of ‘I’ through enquiry into the source of the ego is the direct path for all.<sup>2</sup> It is therefore the sacred duty of everyone of those who are fortunate to get caught in the net of Ramana’s grace either to pursue self-enquiry single-mindedly and if one cannot, to supplement and support one’s spiritual practice by practicing self-enquiry as well. Only thus, can we integrate Ramana into our lives.

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## RAMANA'S FATE

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Ramana's Fate? What does it mean? Is he not the eternal one untouched by fate? Can the bestower of freedom be bound by fate? True. Yet he seems fated to take on himself the Karmas of those to whom he is the refuge. His universal love gives him no choice except to protect regardless of multitudinous sins of those who come.

The human reality is that while devotees are earnest about their search for truth for which they turn to Ramana, they cannot help seeking his protection for their material well being as well. They see in him not only the unfailing doctor for curing the malady of birth and death but also the omnipotent God who can save them from fate's inevitable course. Devaraja Mudaliar, Subbaramayya were like children before a father referring every problem of theirs to Ramana for solace and help. In this they typify the attitude of other devotees who too regard Ramana as a boon giver and protector who would deflect Karma's course. Requests would be made for a daughter's marriage, for employment, for warding off pecuniary calamity and so on, in the certain faith that they would be solved, and solved they would be.<sup>1</sup> The devotees with large families would have a long list of prayers for curing the illness of their children and wife and there would be sure response.<sup>2</sup> Request would be made for a suitable match for the daughter, then for a child for her and later for the safe delivery.<sup>3</sup> A lady devotee praying hard while stranded would receive help from some good samaritans.<sup>4</sup> Ramana himself would never admit of his role of saviour and his help would be always covert. For, his position was that the divine law should take its own course. Once Devaraja Mudaliar specifically questioned Ramana why the all powerful God should not protect the devotees from the consequences of their Karma. Ramana would either remain silent or reply, "What can we say? That is the plan".<sup>5</sup>

Sometimes Ramana would point out the futility of this endless seeking of only 'good' and 'happiness'. He would say "these terms have no meaning at all without their opposites, they are inevitable until you transcend the pairs of opposites and reach the Absolute".<sup>6</sup>

But Ramana could never let down the devotees who had cast their burden on him. The cases of Jagadisa Sastri and Rangayyar are worth recalling on this point. From his death bed Jagadisa Sastri, 'the Sanskrit pandit of Bhagavan's Court', wrote a final appeal in poem that "he would not accept any plea that prarabdha must follow its course and if only Bhagavan willed it His grace could cancel prarabdha and save him."<sup>7</sup> Certain death was warded off. Rangayyar, a playmate of Ramana at Tiruchuzhi and later a staunch devotee, was stricken in a certain period by a series of calamities. Astrologers saw no hope for him. Ramana not only made him stay with him but also insisted on his not leaving his presence for a long time. Once, when Rangayyar sought permission to go to the railway station and see off his relative, Ramana warned him to come back straight "without loitering anywhere or spending the night in town".<sup>8</sup> He was thus saved from evil from which there would have been no escape otherwise.

It is not that a specific prayer should always be addressed to Ramana. For, fate's blows are quick, sudden and totally unpredictable. Then unasked Ramana would be there with his helping hand. How else can one explain the case of a lady devotee who while in Mauritius happily gripped the mike to sing on Bhagavan little realising that death by electrocution was waiting for her through electrical leak in the mike.<sup>8</sup> But then death was humbled thanks to Ramana making everyone's intelligence razor sharp for timely counteraction.<sup>9</sup> While seeing the palm of another devotee, an eminent palmist wondered how this devotee was still alive. 'Could all my vast knowledge be wrong?', wondered the palmist. Then it dawned on him that Ramana had saved the

life of his devotee even without the devotee's knowledge. Whether one prays or not Ramana knows what to do when and does it, but would never accept credit for it.

Strange paradox that this spiritual colossus, totally detached, utterly impartial, should concern himself with many important and even small details of his devotees' lives. Kunju Swami has to go to his native place and does not have money to buy himself eats on the way, so Ramana packs for him pooris for the journey.<sup>10</sup> Narayana Iyer is returning home, the cooks are tired, asleep, and Ramana roasts almonds for him to take back.<sup>11</sup> A devotee, G. R. Subbaramayya, passes away and Ramana patiently cuts all the articles on Ramana in 'Federated India' written by this devotee, makes a book of it and remarks "he was very keen that his articles should appear in the form of a book, now I have made a book of them".<sup>12</sup> We have the most touching scenes of his insistence on giving darsan in the last one year before his Maha Samadhi even when the body was tortured by pain and diverse medical treatment which he put up with only to make different groups of devotees happy. Even on the last day of his earthly existence, 14th April, 1950, Ramana gave darsan in the morning and the evening as well.

In his infinite compassion he kept his face turned towards the devotees the whole time the darsan lasted unmindful of the excruciating pain caused by it.<sup>13</sup> Kinder than the mother who cannot sleep at night lest the child should miss its feed he fulfills every need of all who turn to him with his all embracing love which is at once particular as it is universal.

For those who care enough for the search for truth, his firm grip, the inner and outer guidance, is always there. He never would force the pace, but the change would be there, though not obvious. When someone complained that he had not progressed promptly came Ramana's reply 'how do you know?' When another devotee remarked that while others were meditating well and got samadhi, he had remained

where he was, Ramana chided gently, “Look to yourself. Whenever the mind goes astray bring it back to quest”<sup>14</sup>. When the first European lady visitor after keenly questioning Ramana about self-enquiry wanted to know what one would find, he said, “It is not for one to say what an individual experience would be. It would reveal itself. Hold on to it”<sup>15</sup>. When some devotees developed an inferiority complex thinking they lacked scriptural knowledge Ramana would boost their morale by stating that the purpose of the scriptures was only to point the way to Realisation and only book knowledge without practice was mere husk.<sup>16</sup> He would add: “Mere book learning and discussions are comparable to a man shaving his image in a mirror”.

Perhaps it is unnecessary to debate how Ramana's help is invariably there. When specifically questioned on this point Ramana said, “The Jnani does save his devotees, not by his sankalpa which is non-existent in him, but through his Presence, Sannidhi”. Karma is warded off and boons granted involuntarily. Saving ‘by nature not by choice’ he takes on himself the burden of devotees, material, spiritual care and one reaps the fruits of spiritual effort in growing goodness thanks to Ramana's inner guidance. As one reads the vast panorama of stranger than fiction rescue acts of Ramana one recalls his prayer to Arunachala, ‘You asked me to come did you not? Very well I have come. Assume my burden. Curse your fate if you must’.<sup>18</sup>

1. My Recollections of Bhagavan Sri Ramana by A. Devaraja Mudaliar -P. 5, 20, 24, 80, 81
2. Sri Ramana Reminiscences by Sri G. V. Subbaramayya - P. 5, 19, 38, 95
3. Ramana Smriti - Sri Bhagavan's Grace by Gouriammal.
4. Unfailing Guidance - Zulice Nakhoodu 'Mountain Path' July 1970.  
5 & 6 My Recollections - A. Devaraja Mudaliar - P. 101 to 102.  
7 & 8 My Recollections of Bhagavan Sri Ramana by  
A Devaraja Mudaliar - P. 103, 104
9. Ramananjali in Mauritius
10. My Recollections - Kunju Swami
11. Is it not Divine Love? - R. Narayana Iyer, Mountain Path - Oct. 1968
12. My Recollections by A. Devaraja Mudaliar - P. 56-57. (These articles were later published by Sri Ramanasramam under the title 'Sri Ramana, Sage of Arunagiri by 'Akshrajna')
13. Guru Ramana by S. S. Cohen - P. 158
14. Is it not Divine Love? - R. Narayana Iyer 'Mountain Path' Oct. 1968.
15. The Way of the Spirit - M.A. Piggott 'Mountain Path' - Jan. 1970
16. Divine Glimpses by Vishnu - 'Mountain Path' Jan. 1966
17. No Mirror can ever Shave - C.K. Anavema Reddy 'Mountain Path' Jan 1972
18. Marital Garland of Letters - Verse 94

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## DEATH IN LIFE IS GLORIOUS

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Why does Ramana say this? What is death? ‘Death in life’ what does it mean? Where is the glory in dying while alive? Is it not open to each one of us to make our lives ‘glorious’? One has to find the answers in the silence of one’s own inner Being.

Often when faced with the loss of a ‘dear’ one we try to find out whether there is a continuity beyond. We ponder over the meaning of life. One is also often gripped by the fear of death as age advances or when seriously ill. But both ‘life’ and ‘death’ remain unsolved riddles.

Ramana would be plied with questions about reincarnation, the interval between births, and so on. In replies his ‘sruti’ or fundamental note would always be the same. Find out ‘for whom is the birth?’ and ‘for whom is the death?’ Some of the typical questions answered by Ramana help us to clear the mental cobwebs and focus attention on fundamental issues, the understanding of which alone can give an insight into ‘death’ and therefore into ‘life’. When a devotee asked him, ‘How long does it take a man to be reborn after death?’ the reply was, ‘You do not know what you were before birth, yet you want to know what you will be after death. Do you know what you are now?’<sup>1</sup> Another puts a similar question, ‘What happens to a man after death?’ Ramana answers, ‘Engage yourself in the living present. The future will take care of itself... Let what is born think of its birth and the remedy’.<sup>2</sup>

Let us recall Ramana’s confrontation with death in July 1896. For, he had faced precisely this question: ‘What is death?’ When he decided to enquire about death, with his total attention he intuitively felt that the death of the body was no death. His body was ready for cremation yet he could feel the full force of life pulsating within him. Thereafter he

remained rooted in the imperishable 'I' and was untouched by death.

Ramana would often point out that each day we have the clue about 'death' when we are overtaken by sleep. In sleep, we are dispossessed of everything. Our body is like a corpse. There is no identification with the body, no separate existence apart from 'others', such a total denudation is 'death'. In that there is a bliss which we recollect and seek. But then, there is no renewal on such a death, no sprouting of a new life. One remains the same before and after sleep. So, sleep can only be half the story. We have to find out whether the solution lies in consciously achieving, while awake, the same 'loss of individuality'. We find Ramana suggesting this to the first European lady devotee to visit Sri Ramanasramam, 'Be asleep consciously instead of unconsciously'.<sup>3</sup>

Ramana shows the way step by step for this 'waking sleep', for in it lies the beauty and joy of life in all its fullness. As mentioned earlier, Ramana asks us to examine 'what is it that is born'. Death is only the other side of the coin. He points out that between the conscious source and the body, there is a link which is variously termed as 'mind', 'ego' 'I'-thought. This is the 'Knot of matter and spirit'.<sup>4</sup> Severance of this link would automatically sever the limitation born of identification with the insentient body. One would remain blissful without limitations of time and space, beyond the 'torment of fate'.

The link is cut when the mind subsides and remains so subsided in its source. In his 'Appalam Song,' Ramana says that one should incessantly and joyously pursue this enquiry. 'One has to discover the real source of the mind by exploring within with keen intellect'.<sup>5</sup> Diving inward below the surface of externalities into the consciousness within and abiding as that is 'the death which is glorious'. For, one is reborn to a true life of freedom and joy, beyond all human



understanding. ‘The ego’s death is the play of grace, blossoming of bliss’.<sup>6</sup>

What are the ‘pitfalls’ in the path? Often temporary lulling of the mind is mistaken to be the goal. The deep inner movement of plunging the mind within is not achieved without further questing for the source. On this point, Ramana related a story of a Yogi who asked for water before going into a long period of trance which lasted for centuries. On waking the first thing the yogi asked was for a cup of water. Ramana added, ‘If this is the case with regard to a thought which took shape immediately before he sat for meditation, there is no doubt that the thoughts which have taken deeper root earlier still remained unannihilated’.<sup>7</sup>

One also has to guard against being side-tracked from one’s paramount duty of self-enquiry and Self-abidance by hankering after clairvoyance, clairauidence etc. Ramana pointed out to Humphreys, ‘No master ever cared a rap for occult powers... and such things are not worth having when far greater illumination and peace are possible without them than with them’.<sup>8</sup>

Paul Brunton voices the fear of many as to what would happen when our separate identity is merged in its source. He asked Ramana, ‘Will a man then become quite unconscious? Will he become an idiot?’ To which Ramana replied, ‘Not so! On the contrary, he will attain that consciousness which is truly immortal. When this happens, a man has not really lost himself; rather he has found himself’.<sup>9</sup>

Ramana’s unfailing guidance is the ‘rare medicine which kills without killing’ and restores the bliss of the truly immortal life.

1. Talks - P. 235
2. Talks - P. 192
3. Sat Darshana - Verse 24
4. Mountain Path - Jan. 1970
5. Sat Darshana - Verse 28
6. Self Knowledge (Atma Vidya) - Verse 3
7. Crumbs from His Table - P. 26
8. Glimpses of Life and Teachings - P. 18, 19
9. The Maharshi and His Message by Paul Brunton - P. 41

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## THE URGENT NEED

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The icy hand of time is stealing away every second of one's allotted life span. When the karmic forces which gave rise to the body will get exhausted, no one knows. The young meet 'untimely death'. The young, the middle-aged, the old, none is ready to face death when it knocks, uninvited. The naked fact of the transience of life itself, around which everything is built, seems to have no impact, except perhaps momentarily in the face of unforeseen tragedies. One lets days and months slip by living like driftwood, without even attempting to discover the meaning of life. Topsy-turvy values and priorities rule the roost. Everything else is urgent and important but not the desire for Self-knowledge or the serious purpose to find it through appropriate spiritual practice. Many a life is wasted in the arid desert of motivated and thoughtless action. Even those who have taken seriously to spiritual endeavour are either addicted to intellectual philosophisation or are side-tracked into the bylanes of occult powers. So one must be ready when the call comes, for, all that one has learnt, be it Sanskrit grammar or even the knowledge derived from the study of scriptures, would be of no avail at the appointed hour.

What does being ready imply? Distaste for fleeting things is like the dawn. Then God enters one's life as a Sadguru, as Ramana did in the lives of many in their hour of need. Eleanor Pauline Noye in anguish and in search of peace found it far away from her home in California, in Ramana's smile and teachings which threw open to her 'gates of heaven'.<sup>1</sup> Subbaramayya, the father of many children, had his share of fate's buffets and could face them only by seeking the soothing balm of Ramana's company and words of grace.<sup>2</sup> Echamma, just recovering from the shock of death of her husband and daughter, could survive the stunning blow of the death of her adopted daughter as

well only because of the comforting bliss of Ramana's love and unfailing advice.<sup>3</sup> Charles Madigan tired by endless stresses and strains of daily life carries on just by hugging to his bosom the photograph of Ramana and feeling his presence, which he invokes by his loving eagerness to give strength and succour in his spiritual efforts.<sup>4</sup> Problems arise now since Ramana's physical presence is no longer available and our passion for him is seldom strong enough to feel intensely his joyous presence.

What then is one to do to invoke Ramana's constant guidance. Such is the divine scheme that the balm of Ramana's words of grace have been fully preserved. First we have the advice in *Self-enquiry* and *Who am I?* given to Gambhiram Seshier and Sivaprakasam Pillai respectively, just at the turn of this century. This is notwithstanding the fact that the words were written on sand or on a slate. This was followed by the conversation with Humphreys, the first western devotee, which took place in 1911.<sup>5</sup> Then came *Ramana Gita*<sup>6</sup> covering the period from 1913 to 1917. In the twenties B. V. Narasimhaswamy elicited Ramana's answers on a variety of questions.<sup>7</sup> Ramana's talks in the 1930s were duly recorded by Munagala Venkataramaiah to become a milestone in spiritual literature.<sup>8</sup> There is also Paul Brunton's record of the transforming influence of Ramana's message to humanity, experienced by him in 'the jungle hermitage'<sup>9</sup>. In the forties Devaraja Mudaliar<sup>10</sup> and Suri Nagamma<sup>11</sup> maintained a day by day account of the happenings in Ramana's presence at Sri Ramanasramam. To this we have the added record of Subbaramayya's *Reminiscences*<sup>12</sup> and Cohen's diary.<sup>13</sup>

Thus practically every single conversation of Ramana with earnest seekers of Truth has been recorded and is available to all whose sights are set on the 'most desirable'. The first group of such pilgrims who sought spiritual instructions from Ramana was headed by Ganapati Muni and their questions and Ramana's replies are set out in

mellifluous Sanskrit in the Ramana Gita. The essential question on one's 'paramount duty' raised by Deivarata sets the ball rolling on the whole gamut of spiritual matters. In reply Ramana asserts that the most important duty is to 'discover one's own true nature'.<sup>14</sup> For, therein lies the key to bliss. Since bliss is our very Self one has only to remove the obstructions to our awareness of it. The veil which separates and denies one the knowledge of this true nature is the constant outward movement of the mind away from the Self. For, every single thought is a distraction from the Self.

As Ramana pointed out to Sadhu Arunachala it is no easy task to check this externalisation of the mind. Once Ramana told him that even if one were to commit suicide hoping to think of Arunachala in the last moments it would be futile for, crowds of other thoughts would sprout up involuntarily.<sup>16</sup> Hence one has to find an effective means for mind-control, for inturning the mind, for fixing it in the Self. An infallible and direct means is suggested by Ramana. If one enquires deeply, within, as to the source of 'I'-thought or the core thought, then the mind would be merged in its source<sup>17</sup>, sorrow born of ignorance would be uprooted and the blissful atmosphere of Ramana, the 'Ramana lahari', our own natural state would be regained. Can there be a more urgent need than to assimilate the teaching of Ramana and to make it our own by treading the path on which he has thrown such clear light? Then, his words become our experience. One abides in the state in which Ramana revels.

1. Golden Jubilee Souvenir - P. 359
2. Ramana's Reminiscences by G. V. Subbaramayya
3. Self Realisation by B. V. Narasimhaswamy - P. 100 to 104
4. Based on a letter received by the Managing Editor of 'The Mountain Path'
5. Glimpses of life and teachings of Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi by F. H. Humphreys
6. Selections from Ramana Gita by A. R. Natarajan
7. Self-Realisation by B. V. Narasimha Swami and 'Mountain Path' - January 1980 and subsequent issues.
8. Talks with Ramana Maharshi
9. Maharshi and His Message by Paul Brunton.
10. Day by day with Bhagavan
11. Letters from Sri Ramanasramam
12. Sri Ramana Reminiscences
13. Guru Ramana
14. Selections from Ramana Gita - Verse 2
15. Guru Ramana by S. S. Cohen
16. A Sadhu's Reminiscences of Ramana Maharshi - P. 90
17. Selections from Ramana Gita - Verses 7, 8 and 9.

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## SACRED WORDS OF RAMANA

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Ramana's teachings were based on his experience. They were not the product of the study of scriptures. His words themselves are sacred and authoritative springing as they do from his steady rootedness in the Heart. Later, his early attendants, beginning from Thambiran and Palaniswamy, and seekers like Gambiram Sessaier, Sivaprakasam Pillai, sought elucidation from him on different philosophical books. While explaining, Ramana found that the scriptures were only naming and describing what he had experienced. But that was not the whole story. The eternal ones like Ramana who walk on earth have a divine contemporary purpose to serve. They are not only the fulfilment of the sacred tradition but are also pathfinders. They are the beacon lights for generations of seekers of Truth and are appropriate to the age. Ramana was in many ways a revolutionary. In his teachings we find not only light on the traditional wisdom, which he clarified and enriched, but also an altogether new direction for making life blossom forth in all its fullness, in all its joyous abundance.

Ramana performed the human drama to put a stop to endless and dry polemics and philosophic debates. His divine words are ambrosia for seekers of Truth who thirst for understanding the riddle of life. These words are bound to set fire to the darkness of a life identified with names and forms.

In approaching his teachings one must be careful not to cast it into any mould. Such identification is the product of our background, and will come in the way of our understanding the true import of his words. This used to happen even when Ramana was in the body, and the danger is all the greater now because we are more apt to be carried away by the momentum of our theoretical framework into

which we are likely to pigeonhole the words and teachings. Here perhaps there would be nothing better than spiritual virginity, a clean slate.

Yet another point worth noting is that Ramana would never disturb people's faith or detract them from the paths they were pursuing. But this should not be taken to mean that the Master's teaching was that. His own position was clear and has been lucidly set out by himself when questioned about it. An illustration would be apt to bring this out. Ramana's position always was that self-enquiry itself is the most purificatory and nothing more is required. He made this clear to Karshni when replying to pointed questions on the subject.<sup>1</sup> But he would also say, if asked whether *japa* is helpful, that it leads to purification of the mind.

The only safeguard is to remember and remember constantly the need for an attitude of prayerful surrender to Ramana for the like of him comes only 'once in a millennium or two'. His guidance is always available and is never denied, if only one turns within to the Heart and lets him take over. Has he not clarified that he is the Consciousness sporting within as the Heart? Is he not the Sadguru drawing us within graciously throwing light on the mind?

Just let us take one of his verses, verse seventeen of *Upadesa Saram* and ponder over its meaning. He says that 'If one searches to find out what the mind is, then there would be no mind at all. This is the straight path.' Ramana categorically and unequivocally declares that it is the straight or direct path. Why? Because the other spiritual practices assume that the mind is a separate entity, having consciousness of its own. Based on this the various practices are aimed at controlling it. This would not only be time-consuming but would not constitute an effective means to stop the wandering of the vagrant mind. The controlled mind can remain quiet only so long as it is held under a leash, by breath-control, repetition of sacred words and so on. It is



like giving an iron chain to an elephant to keep its trunk busy. Being temporary and not being the product of the understanding of mind's nature, such practices only lull the mind. It does not matter how long the period is, for it could be quite long in certain types of samadhi or spiritual trances. Hence we find Ramana suggesting a totally different method, a new approach to secure a mind which is silent and which stays silent.

Have we ever enquired what this mind is? Is it a friend or a foe? What happens to it in deep sleep? What does Ramana mean when he says that on diligent search one discovers that there is no such entity as the mind at all? Hence the suggestion of Ramana is that one should search and find out the answer. Any search can take place only in the waking state, it being out of question in the nescience of sleep. If one is vigilant and is constantly paying attention, it would transpire that what is termed the mind is only a series of thoughts centred on the individual or 'I' and therefore one could say that the individual is the mind. If one searches further by enquiring deeply, within, about the truth of this 'I' one discovers that it is not the eternal feeling of 'I' but the 'I'-thought or the mind which perishes daily in sleep. The proper meaning is found as one's fullness of existence throbbing forth as 'I-I' in the Heart. The mind or the individuality is seen as rising, on waking, from the Heart into which it had subsided when sleep overtook one. It is therefore perceived in its true light as a reflection of Consciousness within, as a reflection of the Heart, and as a bridge back to it. The mind which is one's foe in its fickle and uncontrolled outer movement becomes the closest friend when turned inward, through self-enquiry. Then the mind is naturally silent as the truth about it has been understood. The hidden bliss is discovered as one's own nature.

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## NEARER, MY GOD, TO THEE

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Self-knowledge was instantaneous for Ramana. Confrontation with the fear of death ended once and for all the sense of separate existence. He discovered the One, the Consciousness, limitless and all pervading. Ramana remained as that for the fifty four long years when he chose to bear the travails of the body. Short for us. But long and unparalleled in spiritual history. For Ramana, who had felt intuitively from the age of innocence the glory of Arunachala, there was no question of gradual attainment. Steady wisdom was his at one go.

He shared this experience with all through his original works, *Upadesa Undiyar*, *Ulladu Narpadu*, *Arunachala Stuti Panchakam*, and through his replies to earnest seekers of Truth. The path shown by him is so simple, so totally free of dialectics and dogma that the intellectual grasp of it is easy. If one has taken to the Ramana Path, then results must show themselves, in the rapid quietening of the mind, in the speedy pursuit of the inner journey beyond the quiet mind. Peace and power to deal with uncertainties and the ups and downs of life should enable the cutting of the sharp edge of sorrow. Life has to become unhurried and self-recollected. The changes, the transformation has to happen throughout and would be evident in the daily life of the practitioner of the Ramana Path. Ramana has assured us that this would be so. Talking to Humphreys he says, 'The result of this concentration would show itself.... in peace of mind, in power to deal with troubles, in power all round - always unconscious power.'<sup>1</sup> He gave the same reply to Paul Brunton who wished to know the benefits of self-enquiry. 'As you go on you would find that your attitude towards people, events and objects will gradually change. Your actions will tend to follow your meditations of their own accord.'<sup>2</sup> Yet again Ramana remarks that 'gradually the state becomes

automatic and thinking appears and disappears of its own accord. Intuition works where there is no thought and intuition will guide you<sup>3</sup>. Glimpses of the Self, revealed from time to time, would give a taste of the bliss inherent in us but forgotten. Having taken to the Ramana Path if there is no blossoming of these virtues, no joy in life, no peace and equanimity of mind, quite obviously, there must be something erroneous in one's practice of the Path. If in spite of such effort the powerful grip of the externalised mind, if the sway of pre-occupation with sensory delight, if attachments continue to cloud the understanding, then it is time to wake up. Time to be aware of the road blocks which have denied the fruits of the Ramana Way. They must have sprouted in many imperceptible ways.

If one is to be nearer to God, if fuller life is of vital interest to us, failure to take stock and to remedy the mistakes would be a tragedy of the first order. For, Ramana's teachings provide the experience of a new way of life by continuous ripening as one proceeds. Of course talking of being nearer to God may sound odd when God is indeed the most intimate, when He is none other than one's own Self. But until one feels this and experiences this, God is still not near. The obstacles have to be removed.

The difficulty of taking stock is that the truth which is revealed, the natural state which is discovered is there in the beginning as well as the end. It is not something new. Also, once the mental cap is worn to judge one's progress, the ego's ways of confidence and diffidence, hopes and fears would start. The time factor would have been introduced in a matter which is not of time. Also, where are the milestones? Is not the inner journey pathless? What then is meant by being aware of failure to reap the rich harvest of serious pursuit of the Ramana Way, even as the pilgrim travels? When certain consequences have to flow but no radical and fundamental change is taking place, then the first thing is to be aware of this fact itself. This will set in motion an enquiry

within as to what is preventing or obscuring the effective pursuit of a path. The corrective process would begin.

Since inwardness is the ‘open-sesame’ of the Ramana Way one has to be conscious that the bedrock for this can only be built on the firm faith, in the deep rooted conviction, that happiness is inherent, that it is our very nature. It has to be found within. This conviction saps the grip of externalisation of the mind.

One has to be aware of the need for effort, persistent, continuous and watchful, to reach the zone of the magnetic field of the Self. The story of the eight disciples of a Guru related by Ramana is worth recalling. ‘One day the guru had desired that each of them should make a copy of his teachings from the note-book he had kept. One of them who had led an easy going life before renouncing the world could not make a copy for himself. He, therefore, paid a couple of rupees to a fellow student and requested him to make a copy for him also. The guru examined the copy books one day and noticing two books in the same handwriting asked for the disciple’s explanation. Both told the truth. The master commented that though speaking the truth was an essential quality of an aspirant that alone would not carry one to the goal. Earnestness of purpose was also essential’.<sup>1</sup> Any slackness in this regard would be a great denial of the Sadguru Ramana, for, the only way in which the great debt to him could be repaid, in some measure at least, is to adhere steadfastly to the path and become heirs to his experience.<sup>2</sup>

Granted this perquisite of steadfastness of purpose in the practice of self-enquiry, one has to ponder constantly over the practical hints given by Ramana while answering the doubts of seekers over half a century of his spiritual ministration. Though on enquiry the mind will be found to be non-existent as a separate entity, it is with the mind that one seeks to find out one’s true identity and search for one’s source. The mind must be gathered together at its root, and

the attention has to be focussed on the 'I'-thought, on the feeling of individuality. The straying of the mind is to be nipped in the bud, before conceptualisation takes place. The road blocks perhaps may be beyond in the quietness of the mind, in the feeling of the void which has to be transcended with the twin tools given by Ramana, the enquiries 'Who am I?' and 'Whence am I?'

All this is not to say that properly directed effort alone is sufficient for inwardness and to be open to Ramana's Presence. Many a time one flounders even at the threshold. It seems impossible to break the impasse, notwithstanding all the expertise. In this hour of utter helplessness the mood of surrender and prayer can be the recourse, for then, 'grace is needed most'. The dependence on Ramana, which cannot but be an under-current always, would be seen in all its fullness in the hour of trial. But then none exists who has not received his succour, his helping hand to break the mental barrier and go beyond to be pulled in by the powerful current of consciousness within.

Then the river of individuality is lost in the Heart. The pilgrim is no more, the pilgrimage has ended. God is not only nearer, He is non-separate. The path ends in this joyous union and the bliss of existence alone remains.

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